

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 6, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

As Members of the House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on the Interior and Environment, we have deep concerns about the January 4, 2018, announcement that your Department intends to include lease sales in the Atlantic, Arctic, and Pacific Oceans, and the Eastern Gulf of Mexico in the Draft 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (herein OCS Program). We are writing to you to request a detailed explanation of this decision and on the subsequent decision to exempt the State of Florida from the OCS Program. The plan to roll back a decades-old ban on drilling for gas and oil along our coasts is one of the most outrageous and irresponsible proposals to come out of President Trump's Administration.

We strongly oppose this draft proposal which would allow for these lease sales because of the negative impacts that new fossil fuel development will have on the health of the environment and economies of our coastal states. Along the East and West Coasts combined, fishing, tourism, and marine recreation generate nearly \$150 million in gross domestic product annually. The science is clear that expanding offshore fossil fuel development will negatively impact these economic drivers and threaten the coastal communities that our constituents live in, vacation at, work along, or otherwise treasure.

For example, in Maine, tourism is a \$5.6 billion industry—71% of which comes directly from Maine's coast. Our fishing industry and the businesses that support it have even more to lose from this proposal. Thirty-thousand Mainers make their living in marine industries and our world-famous lobster fishery alone brings in \$500 million annually.

In Washington state, the \$50 billion maritime economy supports 191,000 jobs across a variety of sector including commercial, recreational, and tribal fisheries, seafood processing, and tourism. Washington is also home to the nation's leading producer of farmed clams, oysters, and mussels. In addition to the economic impacts driven by Washington's marine economy, the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary provides pristine habitat for a number of iconic species.

Further, as Members of the Appropriations Committee with oversight over the Department of the Interior, we are deeply concerned about the process through which this proposal was developed. When Secretary Jewell released the 2017-2022 OCS Program, it was based on a robust two-year public scoping process that included 36 public meetings and more than 3.3 million public

comments. In contrast, your revised OCS Program was released after a single 45-day request for information that only generated 51,364 comments. Since your draft OCS Program was released, it has come to our attention that over half a million fishing families and businesses have voiced opposition or other concerns. Now they will have only 60 days to provide public comment, which is inadequate.

In regard to the exemption of the State of Florida in particular, we have concerns about this proposal's lack of transparency and fairness. As this decision seems to have been made without any public process, or even Departmental vetting, we would like you to provide a detailed explanation for why this state was exempted after the OCS Program was published in the Federal Register. In your response please address the following:

*The governors of New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Rhode Island, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, California, Oregon and Washington all formally opposed the President's plan for new leasing off their respective shores.

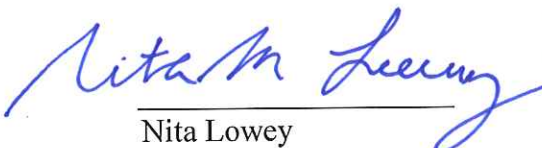
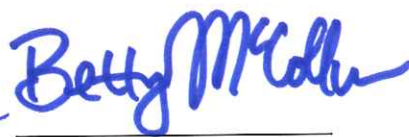

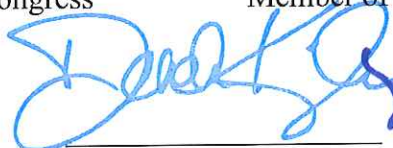

*The Fishery Management Councils from New England, the Mid Atlantic and the South Atlantic have all weighed in with concerns or opposition to the inclusion of other Atlantic states in the OCS Program.

*Coastal tourism and coastal industries are equally important to the economies of the Pacific and Atlantic coast states as they are to the Florida economy.

In addition to the written response requested above, we are requesting an in-person meeting with you to discuss these issues prior to the anticipated budget hearing on the Department's FY19 budget proposal.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and your Department on clear and open communications between your Department and the Congress.

Sincerely,

 _____ Nita Lowey Member of Congress	 _____ Betty McCollum Member of Congress	 _____ Chellie Pingree Member of Congress
 _____ Derek Kilmer Member of Congress	 _____ Marcy Kaptur Member of Congress	